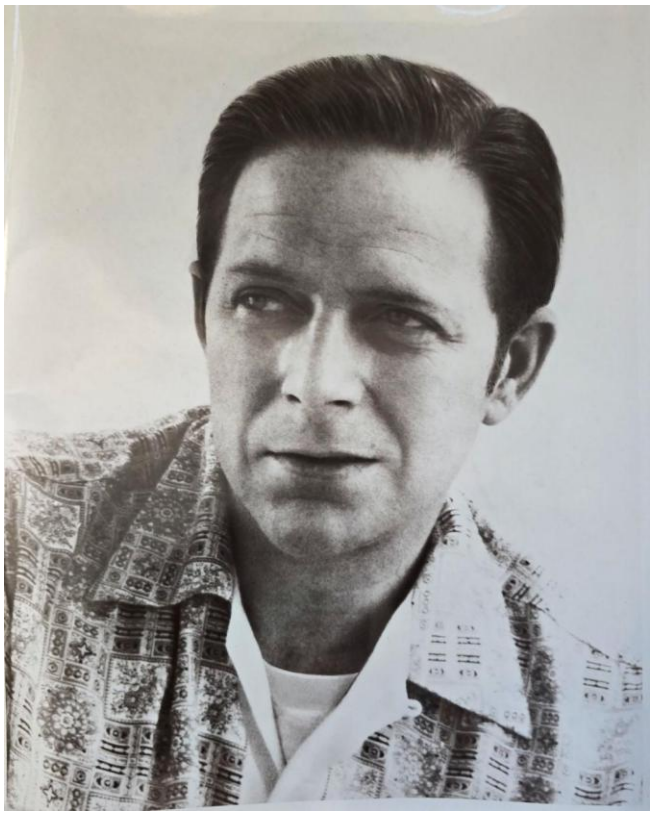
Herbert H. Haley

From the Great Depression to the Golden Age of Radio

1918 – 1970



W7ELX • W9CDT • W8CDT • W6VBY

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With Contributions from Mardi Briggs, Lori Briggs, and Chris Briggs

February 16, 2026

A Biography

Summary

Herbert "Herb" Haley (1918-1970) embodied the American experience of radio's golden age, bridging amateur operation, wartime broadcasting, and the emergence of television. His journey from Depression-era orphan to prominent broadcaster and communicator reveals the transformative power of radio technology in mid-20th century America.

Early Years and Amateur Radio Beginnings

Born in Milton-Freewater, Oregon, Herb faced profound loss early when his mother died at age 10 and his father at 13, during the Great Depression's depths. Raised by his sister Mary and her husband on their farm, he found direction through the Boy Scouts and an emerging passion for radio technology. As a high school student at McLoughlin Union High School, he served as vice president then president of the Pioneer Radio Club, Oregon's only government-licensed high school radio station, earning his first amateur radio license (W7ELX) at just 16.

When the Depression forced his sister and brother-in-law into bankruptcy in 1936, the newly independent 18-year-old joined the Civilian Conservation Corps at Vancouver Barracks. His ham radio expertise positioned him as a critical communications operator connecting remote forest camps across the Pacific Northwest, demonstrating remarkable responsibility for someone so young.

Professional Broadcasting Career

Herb's professional journey began in July 1939, after spending time in Iowa preparing for the FCC Radio Telephone Operator exams, when he arrived at KUJ in Walla Walla seeking engineering work but accepted an announcer audition instead. This launched a remarkable career spanning radio's most transformative years. He progressed rapidly through five Northwestern stations, leveraging relationships from his Pioneer Radio Club days rather than formal auditions.

His major breakthrough came in 1942 when he joined the NBC Blue Network (soon to become ABC) in San Francisco at age 24. Operating from powerful 50,000-watt KGO, his nightly "11th Hour News" propelled the station from fourth to first place in its time slot. During World War II, ABC designated San Francisco as Pacific War news headquarters, placing Herb at the epicenter of history. He anchored war coverage, produced military commentary with Major General Paul B. Malone, and narrated programs

for the Office of War Information. His versatility extended beyond news to announcing for the San Francisco Opera and the city's jazz clubs.

War Service and Philosophical Reflection

"In 1945, with a wife and two young daughters at home, Herb joined the Merchant Marine as a radio operator rather than wait for the draft. He served on two South Pacific voyages aboard the SS Flying Arrow and SS Cape Ann, maintaining the ships' vital communications as "Sparks." On August 8, 1945, just days after Hiroshima, he wrote Margaret a remarkably insightful letter questioning humanity's moral readiness for atomic power: "Finally, man is now master of a power too great to be trusted in the hands of man."

Post-War Entrepreneurship and Career Evolution

After the war, Herb's entrepreneurial spirit led him to co-found Champion City Broadcasting Company in Springfield, Ohio, where he discovered a young Rod Serling and gave him his first professional platform. In 1950, he transitioned to television at WHIO-TV in Dayton, experiencing firsthand the medium that would eventually eclipse radio.

When ABC finally offered him a position in early 1952 after months of delay, Herb faced an unexpected dilemma. His interim work as an electronics sales engineer had proven more lucrative than the $135 weekly broadcaster's scale ABC offered. With three daughters to support in a new city, the practical choice was clear. He remained in electronics sales for the rest of his career, earning approximately $1,600 monthly—substantial income for the era.

Amateur Radio: The Lifelong Passion

Throughout all these transitions, amateur radio remained Herb's constant. Operating under various callsigns (W7ELX, W9CDT, W8CDT, W6VBY), he earned prestigious recognition including the Worked All Zones award in 1957 for contacting all 40 geographic zones worldwide. He served as president of the Southern California DX Club and regularly competed at the highest levels of international amateur radio competition.

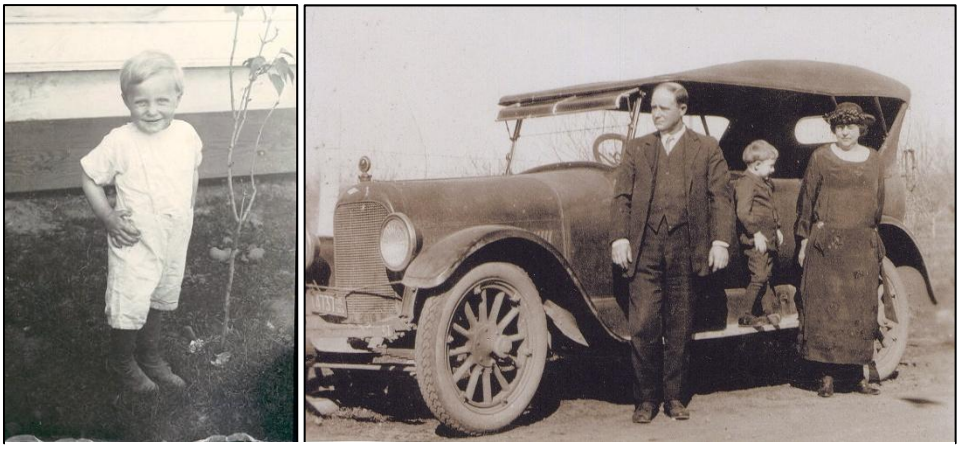
Legacy

Herbert Haley passed away in 1970 at age 52, leaving behind his wife Margaret, three daughters, and a body of work that captured radio's golden age. His story transcends professional achievement. He was a man who navigated extraordinary technological and social change while keeping his focus on what truly mattered: family, integrity, and the connections that bind us across distance and time. From building his first transmitter as an orphaned teenager in rural depression-era Oregon to witnessing the birth of the atomic age from a ship in the Pacific, Herb embodied the resilience and adaptability of his generation.

Herb Haley – "Ham Shack"
Circa 1960s

Background

Herbert (Herb) H. Haley (1918 - 1970) was born in Milton-Freewater, Oregon. His early life was marked by loss. His mother (Maria Catherine Whicker) died when he was just 10 years old, followed by his father's (Benjamin Thomas Haley) death when he was 13. This was during the early part of Great Depression. He went to live with his oldest sister Mary Alberta Haley and her husband E.L. Jamison at his farm in Milton-Freewater, Oregon.



Herb and his Parents and their 1919 Studebaker—circa 1920s

Herb graduated from Freewater Elementary School in 1931. Throughout his youth, he remained active in the Boy Scouts, earning his second-class scout award on January 21, 1932, and his "Rover" scout award on April 3, 1936.[1]

He attended McLoughlin Union High School in Milton, graduating in 1935 with an A average. Beyond academics, Herb was involved in many school activities. He performed in the Dramatic Club and Boys Glee Club, appeared in various plays including the musical comedy "Ship Ahoy," and demonstrated early leadership skills as Vice President and later President of the Pioneer Radio Club.[2] (*W7EWB*).

The Pioneer Radio Club was the only government-licensed high school radio station in Oregon at the time, and Herb was the trustee of the club’s radio license. Herb and many club members went on to careers in broadcasting and other fields. For example, Herb’s good friend throughout Boy Scouts, high school and his early radio career, Paul Walden (club secretary) became a key figure in the Oregon broadcast industry for the next 50 years owning several radio stations. Paul and Herb and worked

together at KLBM radio in La Grande, Oregon and KODL in The Dalles, Oregon. Paul also served three terms in the Oregon state house of representatives in the 1970s.[3]

Pioneer Radio Club—1935

During his teenage years, Herb joined two organizations that reflected his early interest in radio: the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and the US Navy Communications Reserve (US NCR)[4]. While both utilized volunteer licensed amateur radio operators and provided training and access to airwaves, they served different purposes. The ARRL operated as a national network that trained operators to provide communication services during emergencies. The US NCR, in contrast, aimed to maintain a ready-made pool of expert operators capable of managing military-grade communications during national emergencies or wartime. It's important to remember that in the 1930s, communications were expensive and far less accessible than today, making the capabilities these amateur radio operators provided invaluable. Herb used the skills he learned through these organizations throughout his life, including during his service in the Merchant Marine during World War II.

In early March 1936, the hardships of the Great Depression struck home. Herb's sister Mary and her husband, E.L. Jamison, were forced into bankruptcy, losing their farm in Milton-Freewater and relocating to Nyssa, Oregon. With the loss of the farm, Herb was forced into an early independence, striking out on his own at just eighteen.

That April (a few days after he turned 18), he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) as a clerk at the Vancouver Barracks in Vancouver, Washington, assigned to the District Headquarters

Detachment (DHD). The position paid $30 a month, of which Herb kept $5, sending the remaining $25 home to his sister, Billie Haley. Yet even amid national recovery efforts, Herb's eyes were on the horizon. On his CCC application, he noted his membership in the ARRL and US NCR and listed his occupational preference as "Radio Operator"—a clear signal of the career that would define his life.

The DHD managed and operated a communications hub connecting the Army and approximately 60 CCC camps across the Pacific Northwest. At just 18 years old, Herb was already an experienced licensed ham radio operator with the callsign W7ELX, which likely positioned him to serve as a radio operator during his CCC tenure—a role of high visibility and responsibility. Stationed at District Headquarters, he became part of a vital communication link connecting remote forest camps (which had no telephone access) with command staff, other personnel, and their families. Using Morse code and the Army Amateur Radio System, he monitored emergency radio traffic and helped coordinate the logistical flow of supplies across the region.

While his official title was "clerk," his actual role demanded far more. It was considerable responsibility for an 18-year-old orphaned kid from small-town Freewater, Oregon, but the CCC recognized that Herb's existing ham radio license meant he came pre-trained in a specialized skill set they desperately needed. During his off hours, he also found time to attend the National Engineering School, a Los Angeles-based correspondence school popular with CCC enrollees seeking to enhance their job skills. Herb completed courses in Home Mechanics, Radio, and Dramatics[5].

Herb found a job in Waterloo, Iowa and was honorably discharged from the CCC on July 5, 1937. He settled at 412 E. 11th Street and worked at the SS Kresge Dollar Store[6]. Although his activities between July 1937 and June 1939 remain largely undocumented, he maintained his ham radio license under the call sign W9CDT and likely joined the Cedar Valley Amateur Radio Club and the Waterloo NYA (National Youth Administration) Radio Club.

During this period, Herb reconnected with Dallas D. Strawn and Morse Painton, both likely friends from his early ham radio days in Freewater, Oregon[7]. He remained an active operator, and Margaret later recalled that he brought all of his ham radio equipment from Iowa after they were married[8]. He probably participated in the annual ARRL Field Days in 1938—large-scale exercises designed to test the emergency readiness of the amateur radio community. During these events, clubs set up portable, home-built stations in remote locations using independent power sources, demonstrating their ability to maintain communications even if the public power grid failed. (The ARRL still runs these exercises

every June.) While in Iowa, he likely spent time preparing for the rigorous FCC Radio Telephone Operator license exam.

Herb returned to the Pacific Northwest and married Margaret Burnett on May 10, 1941 in Vancouver, Clark County, Washington. Before they were married, Margaret mentioned that Herb bought a car just so he could take her home from work. They had three daughters: Mardi (born 1942), Randi (born 1944), and Melissa (born 1950).

Herb & Margaret Haley – 1941

The Radio Years Begin

Beginning in June 1939 at age 21, Herb maintained both First- and Second-Class FCC commercial radiotelephone licenses[9]. The Second-Class license was a professional credential authorizing him to maintain, repair, and operate most commercial radio transmitters, including those used by police departments, aviation, and marine services—a high-level technical certification demonstrating proficiency in radio theory and federal regulations.

The First-Class license, often called the "First Phone," was the highest-level commercial credential available. Legally required for engineers operating and maintaining high-power commercial AM, FM, and television broadcast stations, it placed Herb among an elite group of technicians authorized to ensure the nation's vital broadcasting infrastructure stayed on frequency and within legal power limits.

Herb's broadcasting career launched on July 12, 1939[10], when he arrived at KUJ in Walla Walla, Washington, armed with his First- and Second-Class Radio Telephone Licenses and dreams of working as an engineer. This timing placed him at the beginning of radio's true golden age, when the medium was rapidly evolving from simple entertainment to a vital source of news and information for American families.

Herb Haley – Radio Announcer, circa 1941

Station owner Herb Studebaker who actively sought up and coming radio talent, had no engineering openings but offered him an audition as an announcer instead. That spontaneous "why not?" moment would define the next chapter of his life, occurring during a period when regional radio stations were

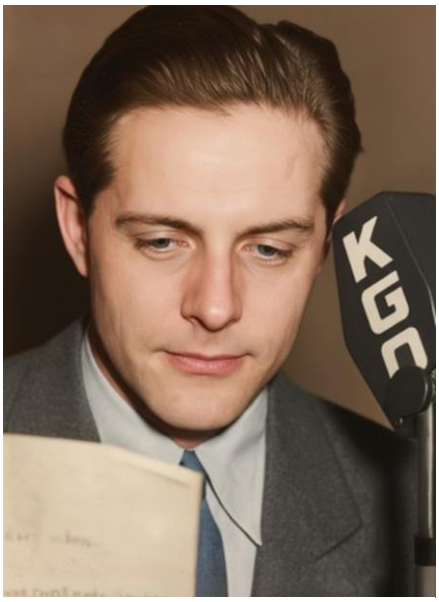
expanding rapidly across the country, offering young talent unprecedented opportunities to learn their craft.

Over the next three years, Herb worked his way through five Northwestern radio stations, each opportunity secured through the strength of his air checks and relationships cultivated through the Pioneer Radio Club rather than formal auditions. His path took him from KUJ in Walla Walla (July–August 1939) to KLBM in La Grande, Oregon (August–November 1939), then KBKR in Baker, Oregon (December 1939–November 1940), KODL in The Dalles, Oregon (December 1940–August 1941), and finally KMED in Medford, Oregon (August 1941–May 1942). This progression was typical of the era, when radio professionals honed their craft by moving between markets, gaining experience across different formats and technical environments.

While building his broadcast career, Herb joined the Baker Elks Lodge in March 1940.

The Big Break: San Francisco and the Birth of ABC

In early 1942, a seismic shift in the broadcasting industry created an unprecedented opportunity. Following an FCC antitrust action aimed at curbing media monopolies, NBC was forced to divest its "Blue Network," which would later become ABC. On January 8, 1942, the NBC Red and Blue networks formally separated their operations. This restructuring ended NBC's dual-network dominance and paved the way for a more competitive market.



Herb Haley – KGO / Blue Network
November 1942

Herb seized this historic moment with characteristic initiative. He sent audition discs to the chief announcers at both NBC and the Blue Network in San Francisco; Bob Dwan, Program Director of the Blue Network, quickly offered him a life-changing position. As the network was sold to American Broadcasting System, Inc. for $8 million in 1943, Herb witnessed firsthand the birth of a major national broadcaster.

At KGO/Blue Network, Herb anchored the nightly "11th Hour News[11]". His impact was immediate: special surveys showed KGO surging from fourth to first place in its time slot—a remarkable feat against three other network news stations. Operating at a powerful 50,000 watts, Herb became a dominant force in the market (at 24 years old). He further established his reputation as a trusted voice of the era by anchoring the Sunday noon news and serving as the lead radio announcer for the 1942 election[12]. Margaret later recalled listening to Herb anchoring the "11th Hour News" from the hospital (with the nurses) in The Dalles (the signal travelled that far) just after giving birth to Randi in 1944.

War Correspondent and Producer

During World War II, San Francisco ABC (as the Blue Network became known after 1943) was designated by the New York Newsroom as the headquarters desk for Pacific War news, positioning Herb at the epicenter of one of history's most significant stories. This designation reflected the strategic importance of the West Coast in the Pacific theater, which made San Francisco a crucial news hub.

His regular assignments included commentary on ABC's "Weekly War Journal[13]," where he helped bring the reality of the Pacific War to American homes, as well as serving as producer for military commentary segments featuring retired Major General Paul B. Malone. This role required not only journalistic skills but also the ability to work with military censors who carefully controlled what information could be broadcast to protect ongoing operations.

Herb's versatility shone through his work as narrator on numerous programs, including "John Freedom," "This Nation at War," and various documentary programs. His work extended to Office of War Information (OWI) programs such as "Report to the Pacific," a weekly half-hour program, along with abbreviated versions and a twice-weekly 15-minute news commentary broadcast to the Far Pacific under the pseudonym Robert Valentine[14].

Beyond News: Music and Culture in Wartime San Francisco

Despite his news expertise, Herb's talents weren't confined to journalism. During his ABC years, he was frequently called upon for classical music programs, even though big band jazz remained his personal favorite. His cultural contributions included serving as announcer for the San Francisco Opera Synthesis Series, conducted by Gaetano Merola. These weekly one-hour programs featured full orchestra and major cast members, with Herb maintaining the libretto through narration—a role requiring both musical knowledge and storytelling skill.

Herb also played a part in San Francisco's jazz renaissance, serving as announcer for a weekly half-hour production show from The Dawn Club on Union Street.

After his service in the Merchant Marine (February - October 1945), Herb continued his work with KGO and ABC. He worked as the announcer on several radio programs sponsored by KGO. These included work with Jack Webb before he developed the popular Dragnet radio and television series.

He worked on many of these types of shows in 1946 and early 1947. Examples include:

- Spotlight Playhouse:
  - From This Window (March 14, 1946)[15]
    archive.org/details/from-this-window-46-03-14
  - Genius From Hoboken (March 21, 1946)[16]
    archive.org/details/genius-from-hoboken-46-03-21
- One out of Seven (February – March 1946)[17]
  - archive.org/details/One_Out_Of_Seven

    Herb delivers the dramatic opening narration: "*24 hours make a day. Seven days make one week. And from these past seven days, the Editors here in our San Francisco newsroom have chosen the one story which they have judged 'most worthy of retelling.' This is... One Out of Seven!"*

- He also recorded a newscast in 1964[18]. The recording describes current news stories and illustrates Herb's distinctive "radio" voice.
  - archive.org/details/herb-haley-news-1964-10-29

More recordings exist, but they are not digitized.

The Entrepreneurial Years: Post-War Broadcasting Expansion

MEET OUR COMPANY

All the stockholders of the Champion City Broadcasting Company, operators of WJEL and WJEM, may be found in the following group of Springfield men who are determined to give Springfield a truly local, an honestly community-minded radio station.

DR. D. J. PARSONS .....President
JOHN HARWOOD .....Vice President
BILL ERIN .....Secretary-Treasurer
HERB HALEY .....Chief Engineer
DOUG CAMPBELL .....Commercial Mgr.

L. W. ANDREWS
Radio Consultant

Herb resigned from KGO in June 1947 and moved his family to Springfield, Ohio. He partnered with another ABC announcer, an Ohio doctor, and additional stockholders to form Champion City Broadcasting Company[19], which operated WJEL (AM) and WJEM (FM). As Director of Operations and Chief Engineer, Herb oversaw both programming and engineering. The venture capitalized on the post-war boom in radio station construction, fueled by returning veterans and wartime savings. The dual AM/FM setup reflected the industry's recognition of FM's superior sound quality, though receiver costs and limited programming constrained FM adoption in the late 1940s.

His first major hire was Hugh Sanders as Program Director, who stayed nearly a year before moving to the West Coast for a successful motion picture career. The station's disc jockeys included Pete Tripp, who later became the number two DJ in New York City, and Sid Garris, known as Symphony Sid, who went on to talent management in Los Angeles.

Your Favorite
News Voice Of The Air

HERB HALEY
reporting
The Top Of The News
for the
VOGUE SHOP

Herb Haley, who has become Springfield's News Voice of the Air, broadcasting daily over WJEL and WJEM-fm from 6:45 to 7 P.M. daily with the latest local, national and world news.

WILL BE HEARD FROM
5 TO 5:15 MON. THRU FRI
over the facilities of
WJEL
and FM Station WJEM

Aug 31, 1947

Listen Today
12 Noon

WJEL
Presents
THE GIFT OF THE MAGI
O. Henry's Immortal Christmas Story

STARRING
• DOROTHY LAMING
• ROD SERLING
• SUSAN KRAPP
• HERB HALEY

WJEL
WJEM—fm

Dec. 21, 1947

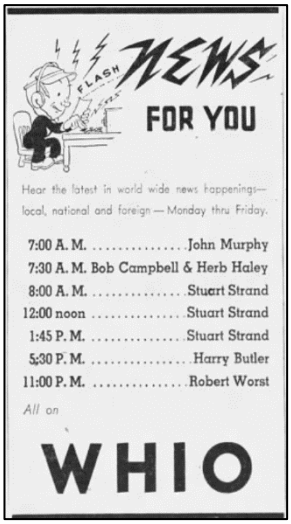
Among his engineering staff was Lee Jason, Herb's protégé, who became a well-known television personality in Fresno, CA. Together, Jason and Herb operated H & J Radio Productions, a small but successful advertising agency handling radio advertising for several amusement parks.

Perhaps Herb's most interesting discovery was an Antioch College student who appeared at his office one day in a tattered paratrooper's flight jacket, carrying a portfolio of manuscripts: Rod Serling, future creator of "The Twilight Zone." As manager of Antioch's radio workshop, Serling wrote, directed, and acted in weekly productions broadcast over WJEL[20], giving him his first professional platform for his original scripts[21].

Herb maintained his on-air presence with three quarter-hour newscasts six days a week, but growing challenges among the partners eventually led him to leave the company.

Television and Career Transition: The New Medium Emerges

In April 1949, Herb auditioned at WHIO, the CBS affiliate in Dayton, Ohio, and was hired as announcer-newscaster[22]. Early in 1950, he transferred to the new television facility, WHIO-TV, where he spent 20 months experiencing the early days of the medium that would eventually eclipse radio.


FLASH
NEWS
FOR YOU
Hear the latest in world wide news happenings—
local, national and foreign—Monday thru Friday.
7:00 A. M. ..... John Murphy
7:30 A. M. Bob Campbell & Herb Haley
8:00 A. M. ..... Stuart Strand
12:00 noon ..... Stuart Strand
1:45 P. M. ..... Stuart Strand
5:30 P. M. ..... Harry Butler
11:00 P. M. ..... Robert Worst
All on
WHIO

Both Herb and Margaret preferred life on the West Coast, closer to family and friends. As Margaret recalled: "We lived in Ohio for five years and spent four years trying to get back here [California] without losing our shirts."[23]

The opportunity came in August 1951, when Herb was offered a position to rejoin ABC in January with full seniority. After resigning from WHIO-TV, he relocated with Margaret and their three children to Los Angeles, only to learn the day after Christmas that the ABC/UPT merger had delayed his start by several months.

To bridge the gap, Herb considered rejoining the Merchant Marine[24] but instead accepted an interim role as an Outside Industrial Sales Engineer, selling electronic components and equipment to the aerospace and electronics industries. By the time ABC finally called, his income had grown well beyond the $135 weekly scale they offered. The "interim" role became permanent. He remained with Valley Electronic Supply Company in Burbank for 13 years, earning approximately $1,600 per month — substantial income for the era — before joining Newark Electronics Company in August 1965.[25].

Amateur Radio: The Personal Side of Communication

Herb's ham radio journey spanned four decades, from the 1930s through the 1960s, mirroring the golden age of amateur radio itself. Like countless operators of his generation, he was drawn to the hobby by curiosity, community, and the irresistible pull of distant voices from across the world.

His passion began early. At just sixteen in 1934, Herb operated under the callsigns W7ELX and W7EWB while serving as president of the Pioneer Radio Club. His progression through subsequent callsigns—W9CDT, W8CDT, and W6VBY—tells the story of a life in motion.

The 1930s through the 1950s marked amateur radio's golden age, when operators built their own equipment, pursued distant and exotic signals, and forged friendships across continents using little more than copper wire and vacuum tubes. Herb thrived in this world, where contacting stations across oceans demanded both skill and meticulously crafted equipment.

He regularly participated in annual ARRL International DX Competitions, frequently placing in the top five of his area. In 1949, he led the Springfield Amateur Radio Club[26].

Herb Haley – President of the So. Cal. DX Club - 1954

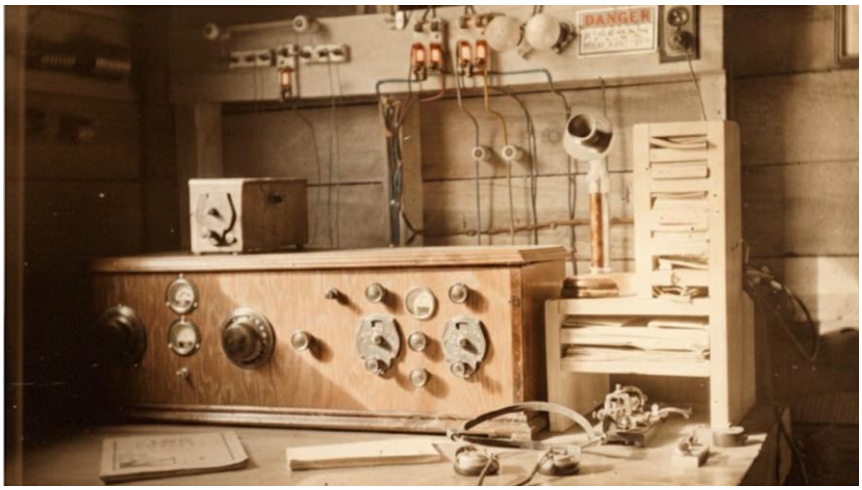
His technical expertise and the respect he commanded among fellow operators led to his election as Vice President (1952)[27] and then President (1954)[28] of the Southern California DX Club. Three years later, in June 1957, Herb earned the prestigious Worked All Zones (WAZ) award from CQ Amateur Radio, confirming that he had successfully contacted all 40 geographic zones on the official CQ DX Zone Map of the World[29].

The Early Oregon Years

At sixteen, Herb began his amateur radio journey in the Pacific Northwest, operating from the Milton-Freewater area of Oregon. His first license in 1934 was Class B, requiring him to demonstrate proficiency in sending and receiving Morse code at 13 words per minute and pass a written examination covering radio theory and regulations, administered in person by a federal radio inspector.

In 1939, he upgraded to a Class A license, which he maintained for the remainder of his life. This advancement required holding a valid Class B license for at least one year, then passing a more rigorous written examination covering technical theory and radiotelephone operation, in addition to the standard Morse code requirement. The exam was designed to ensure operators could handle high-power voice transmissions without causing interference.

Herb likely built his first radio, quite an accomplishment for an orphaned teenager in the Depression. His setup probably consisted of separate vacuum-tube receiver and transmitter units arranged on a simple wooden bench, with headphones for copying weak signals and a crystal-controlled transmitter sending Morse code via a straight key. This functional, economical setup was standard among amateur operators of the era.



Typical "Ham Shack"
Circa 1930s

W7ELX[30] **(1934-1939)**: Operating from RFD1, Freewater, Oregon, this Class B callsign marked Herb's entry into amateur radio as a teenager discovering the magic of long-distance communication.

W7EWB[31] **(1935-1938)**: Herb earned this callsign while active in the Pioneer Radio Club at 963 N. Main Street in Milton, Oregon, serving as vice president and then president and trustee during his junior and senior years of high school.

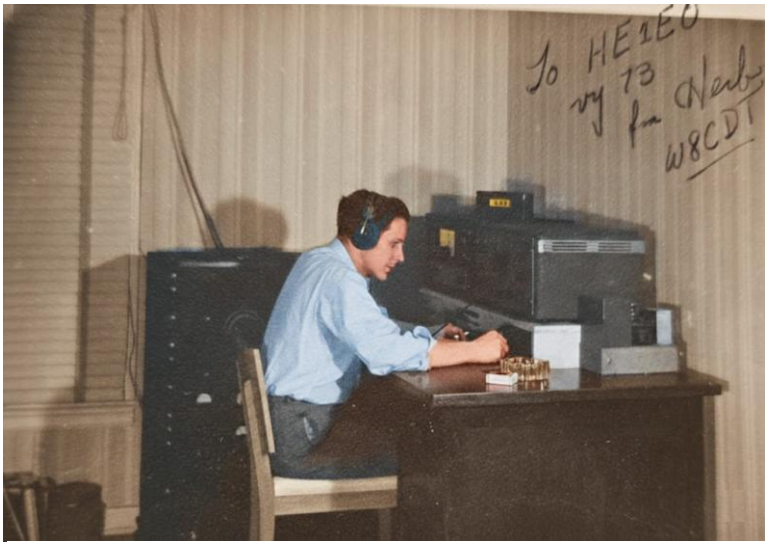
At the Pioneer Radio Club, Herb likely found a mentor in Dallas Strawn (W7FAQ), who was eight years his senior and had been operating since at least 1931 from College Place, Washington—just eight miles away. Their friendship would span years and thousands of miles. Herb followed Dallas to Iowa in 1937 (with its thriving ham radio community), and in 1945 both served together in the Merchant Marine aboard the SS Flying Arrow, with Dallas as Chief Radio Operator and Herb as First Assistant. After the war, Dallas (W6SUH) settled in Los Angeles, where he and Herb continued their involvement in the local amateur radio community.

Another early connection was Paul Walden (W7EQI), whom Herb knew through Boy Scouts, high school, and the Pioneer Radio Club as secretary. Paul became a significant figure in Oregon radio and worked with Herb during his early broadcast years in the state.

When Herb first moved to Iowa in 1937, he maintained his Oregon callsigns.

The Iowa Chapter

W9CDT[32] **(1939-1946)**: Herb's first Class A ham radio license was issued while he lived in Waterloo, Iowa. This period spanned the critical war years and immediate postwar era, when amateur radio operations were severely restricted and then gradually restored. Despite living in Oregon and San Francisco and serving in the Merchant Marine for much of this time, Herb maintained his Iowa callsign.



Herb Haley (W8CDT)
Circa 1949

The Ohio Years

W8CDT[33] **(1948-1952)**: Herb moved to Springfield, Ohio (Evergreen Estates, Possum Road) to further his broadcast radio career. This period coincided with amateur radio's postwar renaissance, when operators eagerly returned to the

airwaves with improved equipment and renewed enthusiasm.

The California Years

Herb's most significant amateur radio achievements occurred during his California years, where he operated continuously under the callsign **W6VBY** across multiple decades and locations:

- **1946-1947**: 33 Heather Way, Larkspur, CA (overlapping with his Iowa operations)[34]
- **1953-1958**: 4507 Stansbury Ave, Sherman Oaks, CA[35]
- **1959-1967**: 5118 Cerrillos Dr., Woodland Hills, CA[36]
- **1968-1970**: 6117 Shirley Ave, Tarzana, CA[37]

Herb Haley (W6VBY)
Circa 1960s

Merchant Marine Service

In 1945, Herb had a wife (Margaret) and two young daughters (Mardi and Randi) at home. Worried he might be drafted, he decided to contribute to the war effort on his own terms. Drawing on his radio expertise, he joined the Merchant Marine as a radio operator (Merchant Marine ID: Z-503351)[38].

The Radio Officer (or "Sparks") occupied a specialized niche as a Staff Officer who reported directly to the ship's Captain. Stationed in the isolated "Radio Shack (derived from the term "ham shack" still used by hams today)," the radio officer served as the ship's sole link to the outside world, responsible for technical maintenance, navigating via radio bearings, and monitoring coded signals amidst strict wartime radio silence.

A Radio Officer on a WW2 Merchant Marine ship worked in the "shack". The "shack" was a compact, dimly lit steel-walled room packed with tube transmitters, receivers, a Morse key bolted to a narrow desk, and a typewriter ("the Mill" that only typed in ALL CAPS). From this space, the radio officer maintained round-the-clock watches, handling encrypted convoy traffic, weather reports, and emergency signals.

Typical WW II Merchant Marine "Radio Shack"

Herb served on two ships in the South Pacific SS Flying Arrow and SS Cape Ann.

SS Flying Arrow

From February 28 to June 4, 1945, Herb served as the 1st Assistant Radio Operator aboard the SS Flying Arrow on a voyage from Portland, Oregon, to Tacloban City in the Philippines[39]. He served under Chief Radio Operator Dallas D. Strawn, a fellow Ham radio operator from near Milton-Freewater where Herb grew up. Strawn, eight years Herb's senior, had also been with him in Iowa between 1937 and 1939[40].

The journey included a brief one-day refueling stop at Eniwetak/Eniwetok Atoll, a small island group with a deep-water harbor and airfield that was strategic to the war effort[41,42]. The ship arrived in Tacloban on April 5 and remained there for over a month. Herb found the time tedious. He passed the days reading aboard ship, exploring the city with shipmates, and searching for cold American beer—most of what was available was warm. On one occasion, he boarded another ship to watch a screening of Double Indemnity. After off-loading its cargo, the Flying Arrow departed on May 14 for a direct return trip to San Francisco, arriving on June 1.

Through frequent letters to Margaret (using the “Mill”), Herb captured the typical experience of a Merchant Marine sailor in the South Pacific. He described the intense tropical heat and the seasickness that affected his crewmates, though he fortunately remained unaffected. His correspondence captured shipboard life: the frustration of mail delays, the distractions of poker and gin rummy, a painful wisdom tooth, and the somber news of President Roosevelt's death on April 12.

SS Cape Ann

From July 6 to October 8, 1945, Herb served as the Chief Radio Operator aboard the SS Cape Ann on a voyage from Portland, OR, to the following locations:[43]

> *Los Angeles → Guam, Ulithi Atoll → Batangas Philippines→ Eniwetak / Eniwetok Marshall Islands → San Francisco*[44]

The ship stopped in Los Angeles on its way to the Philippines from July 18 to August 1, giving Herb the opportunity to spend time with his brother Ben's family and several friends.

After departing Los Angeles, the Cape Ann arrived at Batangas, Luzon, on August 25, where it remained until September 16 without unloading its cargo. Herb spent the month reading, studying

mathematics, and exploring the area with shipmates, though he often complained of boredom. Once again, he wrote about the warm beer and the various methods he tried to secure a cold one. On the return voyage, the ship made a one-day stop at Eniwetok on September 24 before arriving in San Francisco on October 7.

While the Cape Ann was docked in Batangas, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6. He likely was the first person (even before the captain) to get this information. Like most Americans, Herb welcomed the news, hopeful that it would bring a swift end to the war with Japan. Yet writing to Margaret just two days after the bombing, on August 8, 1945, Herb demonstrated an uncommon capacity to see beyond the moment's euphoria:

> *I suppose everyone at home is pretty much stirred by the news of the atomic bomb. It means, probably, an early end to the war. I hope before we are forced to completely destroy the entire nation of Japan. I welcome it. I'm glad we're using it. Realistically we must. But its use merely demonstrates the shallow hypocrisy of man. As an inhumane and barbaric instrument of warfare, the atomic bomb cannot be equaled...the use by the Germans of the robot bomb was, in our eyes, "fiendish," worthy only of a nation of degenerates...yet no sooner had we captured a few models, then we started planning how we might use them most effectively against Japan...the bomb's use is equally as indiscriminate in its effect. Rather than against such restrictive objectives, nor is that its purpose. Rather the admitted objective is complete destruction of cities. Let's just stop kidding ourselves that there are any "rules" in war...nor is there a "double standard" in the harnessing of atomic power. Its impact on society is greater than the steam engine. We have found ourselves with something really "too hot to handle." Finally, man is now master of a power too great to be trusted in the hands of man.*
>
> *The last paragraph I read yesterday in Huxley's "Ends and Means" … is the world in which we find ourselves...a world which, judged by the only acceptable criterion of progress, is manifestly in regression. Technological advance is rapid, but without progress in charity and intelligence, technological advance is useless. Indeed, it is worse than useless...it provides the means for going backwards*[45]*.*
>
> *The Saturday Evening Post's "World of Tomorrow" will give us beautiful life, easy and more and more profitable, only if by some sudden renaissance we rise from our moral lethargy and catch up to ourselves. It won't be quite that easy. Intellectual pursuits, where religion has failed, and every sort of self-sacrifice or indulgence in transcendental thought will never make moral human beings of us. Perhaps if people are sufficiently alarmed by the implications of this discovery, they will shake off their Panglossian illusions of a "good and wonderful world" and become concerned with the great unsolved problem of getting along with themselves.*

Let us hope so, darling...I want a "good and wonderful world" for our children...they deserve it[46].

Broadcasting magazine announced on November 19, 1945 that Herb had been released from the Merchant Marine and rejoined KGO as an announcer[47].

Conclusion

Herb Haley built much of his life around radio starting at 16 years old. A Depression-era orphan who constructed his first transmitter in rural Oregon, he became a wartime correspondent witnessing the birth of ABC and the dawn of the nuclear age. His journey from amateur operator to broadcast professional embodied the resilience and adaptability that defined his generation.

He married Margaret Burnett in 1941, and together they raised three daughters: Mardi, Randi, and Melissa. When he joined the Merchant Marine in 1945, he left his wife (Margaret) and their two toddlers (Mardi and Randi)—a tough decision driven by the desire to serve on his own terms rather than wait for the draft. His letters home from the South Pacific reveals a man acutely aware of the distance between himself and his young family and writing philosophical reflections about the atomic age to Margaret while docked in the Philippines, thinking about the world he wanted his children to inherit.

That concern for his family's future ultimately guided his most consequential career decision. When ABC finally offered him a position in 1952 after months of delay, his income as an electronics sales engineer had grown well beyond the $135 weekly broadcaster's scale they proposed. With three daughters to support and a mortgage to pay, Herb understood the need for a stable financial for his young family.

Even with the decision to leave broadcast journalism, Herb never abandoned his passion. Amateur radio remained his constant companion for the remainder of his life. From his homes in Sherman Oaks, Woodland Hills, and finally Tarzana, operating under the callsign W6VBY, he maintained those connections across oceans and continents, finding what he had always understood.

Herbert Haley died in 1970 at age 52, leaving behind Margaret and three daughters, a remarkable body of professional work, and a legacy that bridged radio's golden age with television's emergence. His story reminds us that the pioneers who shaped American broadcasting weren't just voices on the air—they were husbands and fathers, skilled technicians and thoughtful observers, ordinary people who found themselves at the center of extraordinary moments while never losing sight of what mattered most: the family they were building and the world they hoped to leave behind.

[1] *East Oregonian* (Pendleton, OR), "County News: Milton-Freewater," January 21, 1932, 8; *East Oregonian*, "Rover Scout Investiture," April 3, 1936, 10.

[2] *McLoughlin Union High School Yearbook*, 1935, Milton, Oregon.

[3] "Paul E. Walden," *East Oregonian*, March 31, 2003, https://eastoregonian.com/2003/03/31/paul-e-walden/.

[4] Herbert H. Haley, Civilian Conservation Corps application, April 4, 1936.

[5] Herbert H. Haley, Civilian Conservation Corps discharge papers, July 5, 1937.

[6] Herbert H. Haley, Social Security application (Form SS-5), August 7, 1937.

[7] Letters from Herb Haley to Margaret Haley, 1944–1945, private family collection.

[8] Margaret Haley, interview by Carol and Mike Briggs, November 24, 1996.

[9] Federal Communications Commission, "Radio Telephone Operator License (First Class), No. P-13-1093," issued to Herbert H. Haley, June 30, 1939.

[10] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s, private family collection.

[11] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s.

[12] *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 4, 1942, 8, https://www.newspapers.com/image/1237626136/.

[13] “Weekly War Journal” recordings, University of Missouri–Kansas City, Miller Nichols Library, accessed via ArchiveGrid.

[14] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s.

[15] “From This Window”, March 14, 1946, audio recording, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/from-this-window-46-03-14.

[16] “Genius from Hoboken”, March 21, 1946, audio recording, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/genius-from-hoboken-46-03-21.

[17] “One Out of Seven”, audio recording, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/One_Out_Of_Seven.

[18] Herb Haley news broadcast, October 29, 1964, audio recording, Internet Archive, https://archive.org/details/herb-haley-news-1964-10-29.

[19] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s

[20] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s.

[21] Martin Grams, “The Radio Career of Rod Serling,” Martingrams (blog), September 21, 2012, https://martingrams.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-radio-career-of-rod-serling.html.

[22] “Herb Haley," *Dayton Daily News*, August 16, 1949, 33, https://www.newspapers.com/image/401359315/.

[23] Margaret Haley, interview by Carol and Mike Briggs, November 24, 1996.

[24] Margaret Haley, interview by Carol and Mike Briggs, November 24, 1996.

[25] Herbert H. Haley, resume, mid-1960s.

[26] *QST* 33, no. 10 (October 1949): 35, https://www.worldradiohistory.com/Archive-DX/QST/40s/QST-1949-10.pdf.

[27] "Herb Haley (W6VBY)," *CQ: The Radio Amateurs' Journal*, August 1952, 50.

[28] "Herb Haley (W6VBY)," *CQ: The Radio Amateurs' Journal*, August 1954, 57.

[29] "Worked All Zones (WAZ) Award No. 353," issued to Herb Haley (W6VBY) by *CQ: The Radio Amateurs' Journal*, June 15, 1957.

[30] *Fall 1934 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 141.

[31] *Spring 1935 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 145.

[32] *Winter 1938 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 167.

[33] *Fall 1948 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 168.

[34] *Fall 1946 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 121.

[35] *Fall 1953 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 194.

[36] *Spring 1959 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 297.

[37] *Spring 1968 Radio Amateur Callbook*, 381.

[38] Herb Haley, Merchant Marine seaman's certificate, February 15, 1945, U.S. Merchant Marine records.

[39] Manifest, *S.S. Flying Arrow*, June 1, 1945, Arrival at San Francisco, CA from Tacloban, PI; *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, California, 1893–1953*; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[40] Herb Haley to Margaret Haley, letters written while serving on the *SS Flying Arrow*, February–June 1945, private family collection.

[41] U.S. Coast Guard, *Official Log-Book: Merchant Marine of the United States* (NAVCG 706-C), *S.S. Flying Arrow*, Voyage 1, February 28, 1945–June 2, 1945; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[42] U.S. Navy Department, *Secret Log for a United States Merchant Vessel* (No. 25939)*, S.S. Flying Arrow*, February 28, 1945–June 2, 1945; Records of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Record Group 38; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[43] Manifest, S.S. *Cape Ann*, October 8, 1945, Arrival at San Francisco, CA from Eniwetok, Marshall Islands; *Passenger and Crew Lists of Vessels Arriving at San Francisco, California, 1893–1953*; Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[44] U.S. Coast Guard, *Official Log-Book: Merchant Marine of the United States* (NAVCG 706-B), *S.S. Cape Ann*, Voyage 7, July 6, 1945–October 24, 1945; Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[45] Huxley, Aldous. *Ends and Means: An Inquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1937.

[46] Herb Haley to Margaret Haley, letter written while serving on the *SS Cape Ann*, August 8, 1945, private family collection.

[47] *Broadcasting*, November 19, 1945, 60, https://www.worldradiohistory.com/Archive-All-BC/Broadcasting-Magazine/BC-1945/1945-11-19-BC.pdf.